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U.S. Office of Price  
Administration

Rationing, why and how

Washington, D.C.

[1942]

MASTER NEGATIVE #

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Rationing, why and how

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# **Rationing**

# **WHY**

**and**

# **HOW**

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**OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION**

**Washington, D. C.**

*August 1942*

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# Rationing...

## WHY and HOW

Rationing is something we have read about since war broke out in Europe in 1939. The Germans began rationing butter, sugar, fats, and other articles a few days before their soldiers invaded Poland. England came around to it later. Every belligerent country, in fact, has made rationing a part of its war program.

But though they observed rationing abroad, most Americans felt sure it couldn't happen here. We had so much of everything: food—more than we could eat; cotton and wool—more than enough for the clothes we wear; automobiles—more than any other country in the world; gasoline—plenty to run our cars all we wanted to. We had a wealth of goods all around us—and we were smug about it.

But when war came to us so did rationing. We no longer can get new tires just because we want them and have money to buy them. Most of us cannot buy a new car. We have to carry stamps to the grocer to get sugar.

### What Is Rationing?

First, let's be sure what rationing is not. It is not starvation, long bread lines, shoddy goods. Rather, *it is a community plan for dividing fairly the supplies we have among all who need them.* Second, it is not "un-American." The earliest settlers of this country, facing scarcities of food and clothing, pooled their precious supplies and apportioned them out to everyone on an equal basis. It was an American idea then, and it is an American idea now, to share when supplies are scarce—to sacrifice, if necessary, but sacrifice together, when the country's welfare demands it.

The fact is that, when war upsets our regular economy, rationing is the one measure the Government can take to insure equal opportunities for all citizens without exceptions to obtain the necessities of life. A man with a million dollars, for example, cannot buy more sugar than the person with no more than the price of one ration allowance. With tires, war and community needs come first, for this sharing must be done, not according to personal convenience, but to meet the wartime requirements of the whole Nation.

In a democracy, government controls are relatively novel. Even more important, wartime economic controls are made effective mainly by popular support and participation. In England, for example, the Government was slow to institute rationing, and the delay resulted in injustice for millions of consumers. At one time there would be a great abundance of an article; at another time there would be severe scarcity. Prices of essential goods went up, imposing undue sacrifices on the poor. There were runs on scarce commodities, and there was some hoarding.

England has since instituted rationing on a broad consumer front, and most of these evils have been eliminated. Rationing, Britons know from bitter experience, is a blessing in wartime.

But some Americans may still question the need for rationing in this country—the land of plenty. We have never had to do it before on such a wide scale.

### Why Rationing?

The United States Government is rationing only essential goods which have become scarce because of the war. Goods are rationed so that they may go where they are most needed or, when there is enough, so that all the people get an equal chance to share in the supplies that are available.

Because of the expensive and complicated machinery necessary to administer a rationing program the Government does not ration non-essentials when they become scarce. For

example, a shortage of ostrich feathers would not lead to rationing; only scarce goods that are needed for the war effort or for the health and well-being of the American people are rationed.

By the middle of July, 1942, automobiles, tires, tubes, sugar, bicycles, and typewriters were being rationed throughout the United States, and gasoline was being rationed on the East Coast. As new wartime shortages develop in essential goods this list will be expanded.

### **What Makes Goods Scarce?**

Goods become scarce for many reasons connected with the war. Here are the main ones:

*The enemy has cut off our supplies* of some goods, either by actual invasion of the area from which the goods normally came (as in the case of crude rubber), or by sinking ships which would carry the supplies to America.

*Some goods are diverted* from making commodities for civilian use to making armaments and equipment for our fighting forces. Our fighting men need large quantities—frequently there is little left for civilians.

*Labor and machinery are diverted* from making commodities for civilians to making armaments and equipment for our fighting forces and our Allies.

*Transportation facilities* are carrying more and more implements of war—they cannot always be used to bring goods to areas where shortages of one kind or another may develop.

These are the main reasons why rationing has become necessary in the United States. We have never had it before because we have never been in a war like this one. We have never had to fight in all four corners of the earth at once. *This is total war.*

It is total war on our overseas supply lines, too. We, as a Nation, cannot live isolated lives. We shop all over the world. For example: We have large fields of sugarcane and sugar beets here at home but we normally depend for large

quantities of sugar on the West Indies, Hawaii, the Philippines. We buy wool from Australia and the Argentine. Rubber and tin come from the East Indies, tea from Ceylon.

In peacetime we took these things for granted, and we could afford to do so. The oceans hid no lurking submarines; international trade flowed freely. Now our enemies have overrun distant lands that were our reservoirs of vital raw materials and food products. They have choked off many of the sea lanes and sunk our merchant ships and their cargoes.

### **How Things Are Rationed**

There are two chief methods used in the United States to ration scarce goods. These methods have been developed because the supply and the demand varies for each of the rationed items and therefore all rationed goods cannot be distributed in the same way.

*When the supply is large enough to distribute some to all, everybody gets a share; those with special needs may get more.* Commodities being rationed in this way are sugar and, on the East Coast, gasoline.

*When the supply is not large enough to distribute some to all, the commodity goes only to those who need it in connection with service to the war effort or the public welfare.* Commodities being rationed in this way are tires, tubes, automobiles, bicycles, and typewriters.

## **America's Rationing Program.**

**Tires.** Our principal source of rubber was cut off when the Japanese invaded Malaya and the East Indies. Approximately 97 percent of our supply came from these areas.

Since then we have scoured the remaining areas of the globe for rubber. We have planted millions of rubber-bearing trees and shrubs, and have begun the building of a gigantic synthetic rubber industry. But none of these can promise any substantial quantities of rubber for civilian use in the near

future; and Government administrators agree that optimistic statements on "tires for all, soon" are completely baseless.

Meanwhile, we must get along with what we have on hand—our dangerously small reserve stocks. And today's mechanized war requires rubber in enormous quantities for transport trucks, tanks, planes, battleships, gas masks, life rafts, jeeps—practically every weapon of war.

That is why we cannot afford to use any of our rubber reserves for ordinary civilian demands—for passenger car tires, for example, which normally absorb the largest part of our imports of rubber.

How much rubber is consumed by the modern implements of war? Here are a few facts: A 4-motor bomber requires as much rubber as 36 passenger cars; every automobile tire that we don't make will give us rubber for 9 gas masks; and the rubber required to make a set of 5 automobile tires will just about line the gasoline tanks on one pursuit plane.

It is clear that rubber cannot be spared to make new passenger car tires. By rationing the stock of new tires on reserve, we can distribute our limited supply so that what we have is used to the greatest public advantage.

How is the public interest best served in the rationing of tires? By making sure that the limited supply of new tires goes for essential war purposes, to war workers, and to those performing services essential to the community—services in which each of us shares—such as doctors, nurses, ministers, police, fire-fighting services, mail delivery, and others.

In addition, war workers and others essential to the war effort can have their tires recapped.

Any person who believes he is entitled to new tires or tubes or to recaps may make application at his local War Price and Rationing Board. If the Board finds he is entitled to a share of the Nation's precious tire and rubber supply, he gets a certificate which permits him to buy his tire or tube or recap.

**Automobiles.** The shortage of passenger automobiles and trucks is a little different. We *could* have these vehicles as usual—if we did not have to convert the automobile and truck

plants to the manufacture of planes and tanks. But today that's what we need—more and more of them. And so our great manufacturing companies are making planes and tanks, and not automobiles and trucks. The steel, copper, aluminum, and other materials that were used for the production of consumers' durable goods—automobiles, washing machines, refrigerators, etc.—are now used for the production of the machines of war.

Transportation of those directly and indirectly engaged in the war effort is becoming an increasing problem. That is why we have to be careful about the new cars still in the hands of manufacturers and dealers. If sold without restriction these cars would soon be in the hands of those who in many cases might not be the people needing them most for the service of the Nation. Through rationing, however, the Nation is able to distribute these few new cars to those who must have them for vital war and community services.

Generally speaking, new automobiles may be secured by the same people who are eligible to secure tires. Such a person must apply to his local War Price and Rationing Board, prove his need for a new car, and if the board approves his application, he will be given a new car ration certificate which will entitle him to buy a new automobile from any dealer.

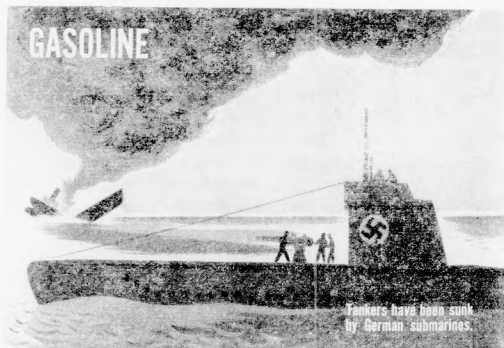
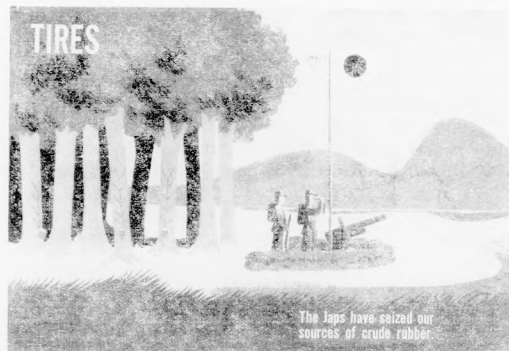
**Sugar.** The sugar shortage differs from both the tire and auto scarcities. Tires and automobiles for civilians are no longer being manufactured, while sugar will continue to be refined for civilian use, for our Allies abroad, and for military purposes. And while only a few can now get tires and cars, everyone is entitled to buy some sugar.

What is the sugar situation? The average American consumed about 112 pounds of sugar in 1941, according to government estimates. One-third came from beet and cane fields in this country. One-third came from the West Indies—Cuba and Puerto Rico.

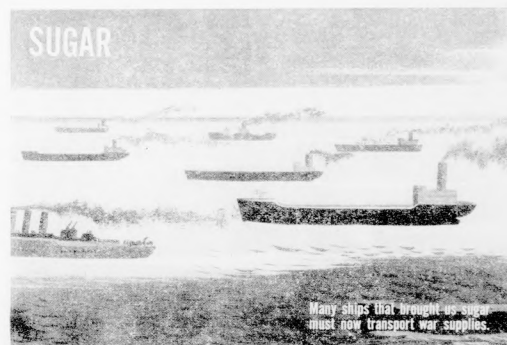
Almost one-third came from Hawaii and the Philippines.

This year we will not get any sugar at all from the Philippines. Sugar fields there are in Japanese hands. We will not

## The WHY of



## Rationing





get our full supply from Hawaii because of the shipping problems. And we need all the ships we have for the grim tasks of war. American soldiers in Iceland, Greenland, Britain, Egypt, and Australia *MUST* be supplied with all the thousands of things they need. It will even be difficult to get anywhere near our normal sugar tonnage from nearby Cuba—because of the lack of ships and because of the Nazi submarine attacks on coastal shipping in the Atlantic.

Who gets sugar? And how much?

Everyone in the country—every man, woman, and child—is entitled to buy a certain amount each week—the same basic ration for everybody. This amount may be changed as the sugar supply situation changes.

The buyer takes his ration book to the storekeeper, who detaches the stamp, and the consumer may then buy his ration of sugar. The storekeeper must turn in these stamps to replenish his supply of sugar.

In addition to the set amount to which each person is entitled, housewives who need extra sugar for home canning may apply to the local War Price and Rationing Board for a certificate to purchase extra sugar.

They can get one pound of sugar for every four quarts of finished fruit being canned, and they may can as much fruit as their families need. Every home may have an additional pound of sugar for each person in the family in order to make a small supply of jams, jellies, and fruit butters.

**Gasoline.** For the ten million motorists in America's Eastern Seaboard States the day is past when it was a personal matter for anyone of them to drive into a filling station and tell the attendant to "fill 'er up." Nazi U-boat raiders sinking American tankers in the Atlantic have made the use of gasoline a public responsibility for every car owner.

There is no shortage of gasoline—but there *is* a lack of transportation. Normally 95 percent of the petroleum products used in the East was brought in by tankers, but submarine sinkings have taken a heavy toll of our tankers. Precious lives of American seamen have been lost. Also many tankers

have been diverted from civilian to war shipping, to carry petroleum to our war machines on the fighting fronts.

Overland transportation facilities such as railroad tank cars, pipe lines, inland waterway barges, are being used to help overcome the shortage. Tank cars alone are bringing in hundreds of thousands of barrels a day more than they did a year ago, but at present all facilities together are bringing in only about one-half the normal supply.

Getting gasoline to East Coast motorists will be a problem for some time to come. That is why gasoline must be rationed—so that *everybody* can get enough for his *necessary* driving during the war.

Under the gasoline rationing plan now in effect on the East Coast, every passenger-car owner receives an "A" coupon book, good for buying gasoline for one year. Each "A" book contains 48 coupons and each coupon has a value of a stated number of gallons of gasoline—four gallons at the start (July 22). The book contains six pages of eight coupons each. And each page is good for a period of two months. Coupons which are not used in the designated two-month period become void and cannot be used thereafter.

Drivers who need more gasoline for essential purposes may apply at their local War Price and Rationing Board for extra gasoline. If they need more than the basic gasoline ration to drive to work, they must prove that they are in a car-sharing club, or, if this "doubling up" is impossible, that other means of transportation are inadequate.

**Bicycles.** With curtailment of automobile manufacture, a new demand for bicycles arose in the United States. Whereas previously bicycles were used largely for sport, now there is a demand for them for essential transportation.

In order to make sure that war workers, communications and messenger services and other essential users would be able to secure bicycles, the Government decided to ration the available supply. Bicycles may be purchased only by persons who need them to travel to work or who need them in their work, providing that such work contributes to the war effort

## The HOW of

### GASOLINE



Supplies permit us to give everyone a share, but some must have more for essential wartime use.

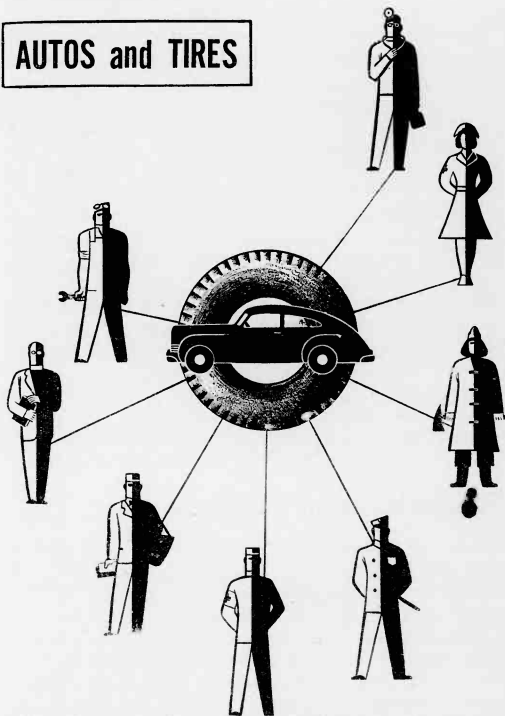
### SUGAR



Supplies are below normal and must be safeguarded, but there is enough to assure everyone of an equal share.

## RATIONING

### AUTOS and TIRES



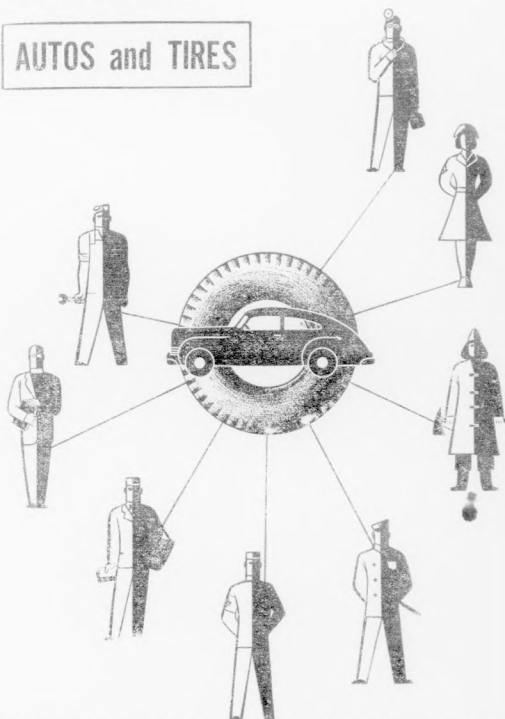
**CARS AND TIRES**—Supplies are not sufficient to give everyone a share. Cars and tires must be available for those whose service is essential to the war and the community.

## The HOW of



## RATIONING

### AUTOS and TIRES



**CARS AND TIRES**—Supplies are not sufficient to give everyone a share. Cars and tires must be available for those whose service is essential to the war and the community.

or to the community welfare. A person who thinks he is entitled to secure a bicycle for these purposes applies to his local War Price and Rationing Board.

Only new adult bicycles are rationed.

**Typewriters.** Typewriter manufacturing plants were well suited for conversion to the production of rifle, pistol, and machine-gun parts, as well as other items essential to the war. This fact and war needs for the metals which normally go into typewriters resulted, early in 1942, in the curtailment of typewriter production and its complete stoppage a few months later. All new production since March has gone directly to the armed forces. Indeed the Government launched in July a program to buy half a million used machines for the Army and Navy. To assure that the needs of war contractors and other essential agencies are met, the Government has rationed typewriters.

Nonportable typewriters may be secured by firms which are primarily engaged in military construction or war production. Portables may be purchased by the same eligibles, and in addition, by Government agencies, newspapers and radio stations, communications services, Red Cross, Office of Civilian Defense, and other essential war services.

Certificates to buy available typewriters may be secured upon application to the local War Price and Rationing Board.

## The Administration of Rationing.

Rationing is administered by the Office of Price Administration. The Congress of the United States has empowered the President to allocate supplies in order to further the war effort, and to ration any commodity if the need arises. The President has delegated these powers to the War Production Board under Donald Nelson, which in turn has made the Office of Price Administration, under Leon Henderson, responsible for the administration of rationing.

The headquarters of the Office of Price Administration is located in Washington, but, of course, any program that

directly affects the 132,000,000 consumers in America cannot be conducted solely from offices in the Capital. Effective administration of rationing calls for a large field force and OPA has such a force. There are, first of all, eight regional offices located in key cities. These offices supervise all activities of the Office of Price Administration in their areas, which usually embrace two or more States each. From these regional offices branch the State rationing administrations, each of which is headed by an administrator. His job is to set up local War Price and Rationing Boards in every community in his State and to supervise their operations.

The most strategic position, obviously, is occupied by the members of the 5,000-odd local boards—by the public-spirited citizens in the community who agreed to give their time and energies to administer the rationing program in all the cities, towns, and rural communities of the Nation. Their task is not an easy one—nor always a pleasant one. It is not pleasant to have to say “no” to an applicant for a new tire or car who may be one’s personal friend and neighbor. Yet they must do it all the time.

The consumer should take any questions about rationing to his local War Price and Rationing Board. If the answer isn’t at hand, it will be obtained from the State rationing administrator, or from Washington.

Such is the general plan your Government has set up to assure every consumer in America his legitimate share of the goods which the war has made scarce.

**WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED READING THIS, SHARE IT WITH A FRIEND OR NEIGHBOR—IT’S WAR INFORMATION**

OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION  
Washington, D. C.

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